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SUBJECT: Greeks Host Third Global Forum on Migration and Development

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Greece hosted the 2009 Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in Athens November 2-5. For the first time, a U.S. delegation attended the Forum, led by PRM/PIM Office Director Suzanne Sheldon and including officers from U.S. Mission Geneva, U.S. Embassy Athens, and DHS/CIS Athens. The GFMD, an informal, non-binding, states-led dialogue on migration and development issues, was attended this year by over 130 countries plus UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon; the previous two Forums were in Brussels and in Manila. USDel's main goals were to quietly advance the Department's humanitarian and human rights policy goals and to "listen and learn." USDel met with U.S. civil society representatives during the NGO-oriented GFMD Civil Society Days (November 2-3) and held informal consultations with delegates from Canada, the UK, and the European Commission during the Government Meeting (November 4-5). The Mexicans, who will host the 2010 GFMD in Puerto Vallarta, requested greater U.S. participation at next year's Forum. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) This is a joint cable between PRM/PIM, U.S. Mission Geneva, and U.S. Embassy Athens.

History and Structure of the GFMD

3. (U) The GFMD emerged from a proposal by Peter Sutherland, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Special Representative for International Migration and Development, following the September 2006 UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (HLD). At that time, there was strong interest among member states in continuing global discussion on the nexus of migration and development policies but also a strong preference to have such discussions outside the framework of the United Nations. The first GFMD meeting took place in Brussels in 2007 and the second the following year in Manila. Future hosts will be Mexico in 2010, Spain in 2011, and Morocco in 2012. A new UN HLD on Migration and Development, building on any progress made through the GFMD, is expected in 2013.

4. (U) The GFMD is a states-led, informal, non-binding forum for dialogue open to all UN member states and observers. The Forum is

split into the Civil Society Days (CSD) and the official Government Meeting, with an interface session in between where the NGO community can provide recommendations to governments. The CSD track has been organized by a private foundation chosen by the host government; for the 2009 GFMD, the Onassis Foundation organized the CSD.

15. (SBU) The USG and a number of like-minded States (Australia, Canada, UK and many other EU countries) have had some reservations about the value of a global (rather than bilateral or regional) approach to migration, but agree that, since the GFMD is going to take place with or without our participation, it makes sense to attempt to influence its direction from within. Some countries, such as Mexico, were initially reluctant to participate unless it was within the UN structure. Others - probably a majority - believe it is best as an independent, state-led, non-binding entity, since such a structure better facilitates open dialogue and debate, and because many migration issues remain bilateral ones that are not appropriately addressed in the UN.

Greeks Announce New Domestic Initiatives

16. (U) Keynote speakers at the GFMD opening plenary included UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who noted as priorities the economic crisis, climate change, and protecting vulnerable migrants. He

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urged all countries to join "the campaign for zero tolerance of exploitation of women and girls," whether migrants or not. Greek PM George Papandreou and Minister of Interior Giannis Ragousis stressed Greece's renewed focus on both respecting the human rights of migrants and increasing enforcement against illegal migration. Papandreou and Ragousis pledged to grant citizenship to second-generation immigrants born and raised in Greece, and called on other EU countries to share Greece's migration and asylum-seeker burden. (NOTE: Illegal immigration to Greece has surged during the past five years, driven in part by waves of migrants from South Asia and Africa and conflict zones in the Middle East. Under the European Dublin II asylum framework, asylum seekers are generally required to seek asylum in the first EU country they enter, and the Greeks complain this shoulders them with a disproportionate asylum burden. Illegal migration--and how to combat it--has become a major domestic political issue for Greece. END NOTE.) Spyros Vougiatis, Deputy Minister for Citizen's Protection, spoke during the CSD opening plenary, noting the increasing waves of illegal immigration faced by Greece but also promising to better integrate and provide documents to legal migrants. Vougiatis acknowledged that Greece had come under intense international criticism for its ineffective asylum system and the poor conditions in its detention centers, and vowed to better protect refugees.

U.S. Civil Society: We Want a Voice

17. (U) The first two days of the 2009 GFMD, the Civil Society Days (CSD), were dedicated to discussions among civil society representatives, encompassing NGOs, academics, international organizations, lawyers, and industry associations from both migrant origin and destination countries. The CSD goal was to gather consensus and make policy recommendations on key migration and development issues for governments in advance of the subsequent

Government Meeting days. CSD participants generally agreed that governments should ensure better human rights protections for migrants, engage and better support diaspora communities in destination countries, and develop more effective programs to integrate migrants, as well as re-integrate them into their home countries (and better use their capital and skills) if and when they return.

18. (U) USDel met with approximately 20 members of U.S. civil society groups representing academia and human rights and migrant worker NGOs. U.S. participation in the GFMD was warmly welcomed, and participants remarked that few other governments took time to attend the CSD and meet with NGOs. The discussion focused on several issues:

-- Migrants' rights and migration policy: Many of the U.S. civil society groups presently focus on the protection of human rights of migrants in the U.S. rather than development per se. With the GFMD's focus on better linking migration and development, U.S. groups expressed the need to better understand concepts such as circular migration and policy coherence. Some participants suggested that the USG could start making "migration impact assessments" for trade, development, and immigration policies--along lines similar to that of environmental impact statements.

-- A greater civil society voice in the U.S. policy process: Participants were unclear about the potential for the GFMD to influence U.S. policy--especially since the Forum is an informal, non-binding, states-led process, and there has not been official U.S. participation in the past. If the GFMD were not an effective way to do policy advocacy, U.S. groups would be less interested in engaging in the future.

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-- Fair labor practices toward migrants: Some U.S. civil society entities, especially labor unions, were not enthusiastic about the GFMD's focus on circular migration as a model, fearing that it could be used to justify exploitative temporary worker programs. (NOTE: Circular migration is a model designed in theory to benefit both origin and destination countries; origin countries provide labor, while in destination countries migrants pick up skills and capital which they can bring back home to aid in development. END NOTE.) Instead, some participants said, the GFMD should focus on migrants' rights and fair labor practices.

Integrating Migration into Development Strategies

19. (U) For the 2009 GFMD Government Meeting, the Greek Chair chose the theme "Integrating Migration Policies into Development Strategies for the Benefit of All." Discussions in Athens focused on the practical and statistical needs of countries, especially developing countries, to better integrate migration and development policies. However, few participants articulated precisely how the Forum should address the links between migration and development and what aspects of development (e.g., remittances, labor migration policy, development assistance, trade policy) would be the most fruitful lines of inquiry.

10. (U) The formal Government Meeting discussions in Athens took place in three substantive Roundtables:

-- Roundtable 1: How to Make the Migration - Development Nexus Work for the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which explored ways to ensure diasporas are part of national development strategies in both migrant origin and destination countries, and examined the impact of the current economic crisis on global migration patterns;

-- Roundtable 2: Migrant Integration, Reintegration and Circulation For Development, which examined new patterns of labor migration, especially temporary migration and circular migration, that have arisen as a result of globalization; and

-- Roundtable 3: Policy and Institutional Coherence and Partnerships, in which participants discussed how the GFMD should interact with existing Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) and how countries can collect and manage data on migration patterns to improve national policymaking.

In addition to the three Roundtables, there was a special session for heads of delegation to discuss the Future of the Forum and the lead-up to the next HLD in 2013.

¶11. (SBU) The Roundtables were conducted under Chatham House rules, which preclude direct attribution of comments. However, USDel noted that the bulk of comments in the Roundtables came from representatives of developing countries that are grappling with growing mixed migration flows. Much of the discussion, especially in Roundtable 1, but to some degree also in Roundtable 3, emphasized the need for more complete and more accurate data on migration flows. Although the sessions were largely non-confrontational, a number of delegations, in particular from Latin America, emphasized the need to guarantee human rights for migrants and to ensure all countries--both origin and destination countries--received the maximum social and economic benefits of migration. The delegations from Ecuador, Peru, and Cuba made impassioned pleas for "regularization" of immigration status,

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equivalent treatment (access to justice, health care, etc.) for migrant and local workers and (in the case of Ecuador and Peru) completely open migration policies and even common citizenship in their regions.

2009 GFMD: Key Conclusions

¶12. (SBU) There was no formal report issued at the conclusion of the GFMD. However, each session was assigned a general rapporteur who summarized the discussion and reported the broad non-binding conclusions of each Roundtable to the concluding plenary.

¶13. (SBU) The major conclusions and/or policy recommendations that emerged from the Roundtables were:

-- The need for national governments to ensure greater policy

coordination between all relevant ministries so that there is adequate "policy coherence" at national and local levels; to ensure that the potential benefits of migration to both origin and destination countries are not undermined by the unintended consequences of government policies.

-- There is a lack of accurate and up-to-date data on both inbound and outbound migration flows for many countries and regions. Many delegations expressed interest in a European Commission program for creating "migration profiles" that collect, collate, and manage the data policymakers need on immigration origin countries in order to successfully integrate migration and development. There was broad agreement that such profiles can only be useful if the data are regularly updated and there is "buy-in" from the subject countries.

-- Diasporas can make valuable contributions to development, both in their countries of origin and new home countries. Including diaspora representatives in development planning must be part of a coherent national strategy based upon accurate data and mutual respect. One practical proposal in this area was for future Forums to create a handbook detailing lessons learned and practical guidelines for how governments can engage diaspora communities in development activities.

-- The current global economic crisis and other impacts of globalization have given rise to new forms of temporary and circular migration. Coordinated, unrestricted, and transparent sharing of data and experiences between countries of origin and destination is needed in order to ensure policy responses to the crisis can be based upon the best available evidence.

-- There needs to be special attention given to combating xenophobia and discrimination towards migrants in times of economic crisis and job losses. Countries should seriously consider the impact of climate change on migration and address this problem jointly before it leads to increased migratory flows.

-- Against the backdrop of increased circular migration, countries should focus on ensuring the rights and adequate integration of migrants in host countries, as well as if and when they return home to "reintegrate." This may require countries to undertake studies and data collection on the impact of circular migration and to consider ways to define a set of indicators to evaluate reintegration policies and programs. The 2010 global census round

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can provide an opportunity to advance knowledge of, and improve data collection on global and regional migratory patterns.

-- Most GFMD members want to maintain the Forum's non-binding, informal, and states-led structure outside of the United Nations system. At the same time, Special Representative Sutherland reminded GFMD participants that the UN can make an important contribution to discussions on global migration so the Forum needs to think how it wishes to prepare for the 2013 High level Dialogue.

-- Several participants expressed concern that the GFMD needs to better enhance the links between migration and the global development agenda. A number of donor countries made pledges to support the Geneva-based GFMD Support Unit.

-- While maintaining its state-led character, the GFMD needs to consider how to build closer relations with civil society.

U.S. Consultations with Canada, UK, and EC

¶14. (SBU) In line with a "listen and learn" approach towards the GFMD, the U.S. delegation held an informal meeting with Canadian and UK delegates. The British explained the GFMD's focus on the concepts of circular migration and migration management, noting that the vagueness of these terms allowed developing origin countries and developed destination countries to interpret the concepts differently. Origin countries could focus on labor rights for migrants and development, while source countries could focus on migration enforcement and controlled immigration policies. Some European countries faced labor shortages, so the idea of circular migration was attractive. The Canadians expressed interest in the European Commission's "migration profiles" program for migration source countries, noting that it would be useful when paired with Canada's points-based immigration process. Delegates also discussed a code of conduct for the recruitment and hiring of origin country health workers.

¶15. (SBU) USDel also met with European Commission official Soenke Schmidt, who explained the EU perspective on the GFMD: keep it out of the UN framework, keep it informal, and lessen the frequency of meetings to allow for more practical groundwork during the interim--perhaps once every two years. Schmidt noted that the EU supported institutionalizing/formalizing the Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs), such as the Mediterranean 5-plus-5 RCP, when the "timing was right."

¶16. (SBU) Canadian, UK, Australian, Japanese, and EU delegates uniformly agreed that they had no interest in ratifying the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Delegates noted that the convention had a very expansive view of the rights of migrants--especially illegal immigrants. (NOTE: As of November 2009, the convention had been ratified by 42 countries, all migration source countries. Several of these countries publicly called for ratification of the convention during the GFMD. END NOTE.)

Looking Ahead: 2010 GFMD, Puerto Vallarta

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¶17. (SBU) As part of their planning for the 2010 GFMD, Mexican delegates met privately with USDel to explain their plans and solicit U.S. views. The Mexican MFA and National Immigration Institute are co-organizers. But, in light of the current global economic crisis and its impact on the Mexican government budget, the GOM is planning a low-budget event. Their initial cost projection was 2 million euro (\$3 million) and they are seeking donations from both member states and private foundations, as was done for past GFMD meetings. They promised not to make the 2010 GFMD a forum focused solely on the Mexican immigration agenda and pledged to work closely with the U.S. and other destination countries to ensure a well-rounded program. The Mexican delegation has already chosen a CSD organizing partner, the BBVA Bancomer Foundation, which is associated with Mexico's largest private bank

and has strong experience working on migration issues. Mexico hopes for an increased American role in 2010 and will continue to welcome USG suggestions on themes for next year's roundtables.

¶18. (SBU) The Mexican participants also mentioned their view that the overarching migration issue for the U.S.- Mexico relationship is one of "shared responsibility." Mexico consistently seeks to include this term in U.N. and other resolutions. When asked what he meant by this, Mexican Coordinator for International and Inter-Institutional Relations Rolando Alonso said that the Mexican responsibility is to re-integrate returning migrants, while the U.S. responsibility is to "understand our reality." He said that the labor market reflected this reality (apparently referring to the large number of undocumented Mexican migrants working in the U.S. economy) and that U.S. law should be consistent (other Latin American delegations also mentioned regularization of immigration status as an important goal). Alonso also expressed the opinion that both undocumented and legal Mexican immigrants were too often separated from their family members.

¶19. (U) Heads of delegation met on November 5 to discuss the future of the forum. While a wide variety of views were expressed, there was broad consensus that the GFMD should remain informal and state-led so as to best facilitate open dialogue and debate; the main result should be policy outcomes; there should be more participation by private sector groups, in addition to NGOs; government sessions should not include civil society participants; and, there should be better ways to disseminate the issues and outcomes discussed in the forum to the outside world. Delegations differed on whether there should be a multi-year work plan. Sweden and Denmark supported this idea; Germany said it might have the opposite of the intended effect by narrowing the agenda and thereby inhibiting open exchanges; Switzerland said it could be helpful if "carefully controlled." The USDel opposed a multi-year work plan, noting that the Forum will have the most potential to be effective if its agenda is allowed to develop organically.

¶20. (SBU) COMMENT: U.S. delegates found the GFMD to be a useful opportunity to share and learn information and best practices on migration policy issues--especially from like-minded migrant destination countries. As EU countries have played a lead role in developing the GFMD and negotiating agenda items with migrant source countries, Forum discussions tended to focus on Euro-centric migration management models, such as circular migration between African and European countries. The 2010 GFMD in Mexico presents the opportunity for the U.S. to offer its own take on migration management, development, and best practices, such as migrant integration and English language programs, thriving diaspora communities, and regional consultative processes. END COMMENT.
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